

ATHLETIC GARMENT WITH INNER THIGH GUARDS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to athletic garments with protective
5 padding.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The most dangerous positions in baseball are infielders, which include the
catcher position. When an infielder is in the fundamental ready position he or she is
especially vulnerable to injury in the inner thighs. Those playing the position of catcher
10 are particularly subject to such injuries. The catcher must crouch or squat immediately
behind the plate with his or her knees apart while the ball is being thrown directly over
the plate at the catcher. Consequently, the ball often hits the catcher either because the
batter misses the on-coming ball entirely or because the bat only deflects the ball. To
protect against injuries, catchers wear a variety of protective gear including helmets,
15 masks, chest plates, cups and shin and knee guards. However, there remains a need to
protect the inner thighs of infielders and especially the catcher, as this body area is
exposed when these players are in the fundamental ready position.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to an athletic garment. The garment
20 comprises a body including a pair of thigh portions. The garment further comprises a
pair of guard members, one supported by each of the thigh portions over the inner thigh
when the garment is worn.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 shows a front perspective view of an athletic garment made in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 2 shows a rear view of the athletic garment shown in Figure 1.

5 Figure 3 shows an enlarged, partially cutaway view of the protective pad supported on the inside of each of the thigh portions of the garment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Turning now to the drawings in general and to Figures 1 and 2 in particular, there is shown therein an athletic garment made in accordance with the present invention and designated generally by the reference numeral 10. In the embodiment illustrated, the garment 10 is a pair of shorts, however the garment could take the form of long pants or any other item of apparel that include a portion that covers the thighs. Preferably, the garment is a pair of compression shorts made of a blend of nylon and Lycra® spandex material, or some other highly elastic, washable and durable fabric.

10 15 However, the garment may be formed of virtually any material, elastic or otherwise. While particularly suitable for baseball players in the position of catcher and other infielders, the protective garment of this invention will be useful by athletes in other sports as well, including but not limited to football, soccer and hockey, for example.

The garment 10 comprises a body portion 12 including a pair of thigh 20 portions 14 and 16. In most instances, the body portion 12 will have a waistband 20 and the thigh portions will have hems 22 and 24. More preferably, the body portion 12 will comprise a pair of side portions 26 and 28, continuous with the thigh portions 14 and 16, respectively, the side portions being joined by a crotch portion 30.

The garment 10 further comprises a pair of guard members such as the pads 32 and 34. The pads 32 and 34 are supported by the thigh portions 14 and 16 over the respective adjacent inner thighs of the wearer when the garment is worn. As used herein, "inner thigh" refers to the medial aspect of the thigh, that is, the area generally 5 between the front and back of the leg and between the knee and groin. This is to be distinguished from the frontal aspect of the thigh.

Preferably, the pads 32 and 34 are flexible so that they will conform to the shape of the thigh and bend when the wearer moves. More preferably, the pads 32 and 34 are shock absorbing in order to absorb at least part of the impact of a ball or other 10 blow to the inner thigh during sports activities. Still further, it is desirable if the pads 32 and 34 are deflective so that blows from balls and the like will be deflected away from the thigh area.

Figure 3 illustrates a preferred structure for the pads 32 and 34. As the pads 32 and 34 are identically formed, only the pad 34 is shown and described in detail. 15 The pad 34 preferably is formed of a first deflective layer 36 and a second shock-absorbing layer 38. The first layer 36 preferably is flexible, or bendable, so that it can be curved to conform to the contour of the thigh, and also dense or hard enough to deflect at least a portion of the impact. More preferably, the first layer 36 is highly porous and lightweight. Even more preferably, the first layer 36 is made of a non-elastic, flexible, 20 hardened pliant substance, such as plastic. It may take the form of a grid or lattice, as shown; this makes the first layer 36 lightweight, flexible and washable, resistant to crumpling or folding, and capable of deflecting at least some of the impact of a blow from a ball or other object. Alternatively, the deflective layer 36 may be a solid sheet.

The second layer 38 preferably is a relatively compressible medium such as dense foam, which is shock absorbent and also washable. In most instances, the first layer 36 will be under the second layer 38, that is, nearer the thigh of the wearer.

As indicated, the pads 32 and 34 are supported over the inner aspect of the 5 thigh. To this end, the garment 10 may be formed with pouches or pockets 40 and 42. Usually, the pockets 40 and 42 will be formed on the inside of the thigh portions 14 and 16; however, a similar protective effect would be achieved by supporting the pads 32 and 34 on the outside of the garment 10.

The pockets 40 and 42 may be simply provided by stitching a piece of 10 fabric 44 (shown only in Figure 3) slightly larger than the pads 32 and 34 on the side of the thigh portions 14 and 16 of the garment 10. This fabric 44 should be washable, absorbent and non-abrasive, as it will directly contact the skin. As thus constructed, the pocket 44 is formed by stitching or otherwise adhering the edges of the fabric 44 on the inside of the thigh portion 16 with the first layer 36 and the second layer 38 sandwiched 15 therebetween.

It will be apparent now that in some cases, it may be advantageous to leave a portion of the pockets open so that the pads can be removed. To that end, each pocket could be provided with a zippered, hook and latch, buttoned or flapped closure. However, in the preferred embodiment the pads are not removable.

20 Now it will be appreciated that the garment of the present invention provides athletes with protection not heretofore available. Conventional compression shorts or pants can be provided with protective pads for the inner thighs to protect athletes in general and baseball catchers in particular against injuries to this especially

vulnerable and tender area of the body. The pads can be removably or non-removably supported on the inside or outside of the thigh portion of the pants or shorts. When constructed of the materials described herein, the garment is washable and durable as well.

5 Changes can be made in the combination and arrangement of the various parts and elements described herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.